

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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UNCLAS LONDON 06180

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, UK, PINT
SUBJECT: NOT YET OFF INTO THE WILD BLUE YONDER

BEGIN SUMMARY: FOR THE SECOND TIME IN TWO DAYS, STRIKING
MAINTENANCE ENGINEERS AT HEATHROW AIRPORT HAVE REJECTED A
"PEACE FORMULA" PUT FORWARD BY THE LEADERSHIP OF THEIR
UNION, THE AMALGAMATED UNION OF ENGINEERING WORKERS
(AUEW) AND THEIR EMPLOYER (BRITISH AIRWAYS (BA). THE
WILDCAT STRIKE HAS CRIPPLED BA OPERATIONS, STOPPING ALL
OF ITS UK FLIGHTS, REDUCING BY HALF ITS EUROPEAN SHORT-
HAUL OPERATIONS AND ELIMINATING SOME OF ITS INTERNATIONAL
MOVEMENTS. (ADDING TO TOURIST WOES IS A 24 HOUR STRIKE
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CALLED BY TRAIN GUARDS AT LONDON'S KING'S CROSS STATION.)
THESE AND OTHER STRIKES SINCE THE BEGINNING OF 1977
REFLECT GROWING STRAINS OF A RIGID WAGE RESTRAINT POLICY.
END SUMMARY.

1. THE "PEACE FORMULA" CONCEDED THAT THE CLAIMS OF THE
4,000 STRIKING MAINTENANCE ENGINEERS (FOR IMPROVED SHIFT

ALLOWANCES AND SEPARATE NEGOTIATING MACHINERY WITHIN THE UNION) WOULD BE LOOKED AT AFTER THEY RETURNED TO WORK, BUT THE STRIKERS CONSIDERED THE FORMULA INSUFFICIENT. ANOTHER ATTEMPT WILL BE MADE OVER THE WEEKEND BY THE AUEW AND BA TO DEAL WITH THEIR CLAIMS AND A MASS-MEETING OF THE MAINTENANCE ENGINEERS WILL FOLLOW ON MONDAY TO CONSIDER THE RESULT OF THESE EFFORTS. THE DISPUTE, WHICH HAS CONTINUED FOR 13 DAYS, HAS COST BA A REPORTED LOSS OF 2 MILLION POUNDS A DAY, AND AN ESTIMATED TOTAL LOSS OF ABOUT 30 MILLION POUNDS. BA OPERATES LEAPED INTO THE BREACH AND AS A RESULT IS EXOECTED TO RECOVER ABOUT HALF OF THE LOST REVENUE.

2. LIFE FOR TOURISTS WAS FURTHER COMPLICATED TODAY (APRIL 15) AS A RESULT OF A 24 HOUR STRIKE (ENDING TOMORROW) BY RAILWAY GUARDS AT KINO'S CROSS STATION IN LONDON. THE STRIKE WAS CALLED IN PROTEST AGAINST THE DISCIPLINARY ACTION TAKEN BY BRITISH RAIL AGAINST TWO OF THE GUARDS WHO HAD REFUSED TO TAKE OUT TRAINS BECAUSE OF HEATING PROBLEMS.

3. COMMENT. STRESSES AND STRAINS IN BRITISH INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ARE REFLECTED IN THE TOOLROOM DISPUTE WHICH DISRUPTED BRITISH LEYLAND, THE CURRENT BRITISH AIRWAYS STRIKE, A CONTINUING STRIKE AT BRITISH STEEL'S PORT TALBOT PLANT, AS WELL AS OTHER LESSER DISPUTES SUCH AS THE KING'S CROSS STOPPAGE. AT THE END OF MARCH, THE DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT REPORTED THAT THE NUMBER OF WORKING DAYS LOST THROUGH STRIKES IN FEBRUARY WAS 713,000
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THE HIGHEST SINCE THE 6 POUND PAY POLICY WAS INTRODUCED. BRITISH LEYLAND TOOL DISPUTE, THE ACTUAL NUMBER OF STRIKES TAKING PLACE IN FEBRUARY (301) WAS THE HIGHEST SINCE MID-1975, JUST PRIOR TO THE INAUGURATION OF THE 6 POUND WAGE LIMIT. MOREOVER, THE JANUARY STRIKE FIGURE OF 443,000 WORKING DAYS LOST WAS ALSO HIGHER THAN IN ANY MONTH OF 1976, WHICH WAS HAILED AS A VERY GOOD YEAR IN TERMS OF INDUSTRIAL PEACE. WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT A LITTLE LESS THAN HALF OF THE 221 STRIKES WHICH BEGAN IN FEBRUARY WERE OVER PAY, THE STRESSES AND STRAINS OF A RIGID PAY POLICY ARE A KEY UNDERLYING CAUSE OF MANY DISPUTES.

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